UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

SELECTIONS FROM
THE MILWAUKEE TAVERN

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

in partial fulfillment for the requirements for the

Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Norman, Oklahoma

2021

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SELECTIONS FROM

THE MILWAUKEE TAVERN

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

Set in Oklahoma beginning in late 1969, The Milwaukee Tavern follows Elaine Russell, a young, Black closeted lesbian woman who is recently hired on as a reporter for a Tulsa area broadcast news station, and Wendy Webster, a young white woman who has been working at the news station for a few years, who aspires to become an anchor. Elaine must navigate the racism and sexism in her new workplace as she strives to help bring fair and comprehensive news coverage to the Black and Gay liberation movements. Wendy reckons with the new responsibilities of a promotion, discovers her own sexual identity, negotiates her relationship with the idea of liberation. Despite their differences, the women are drawn to one another and grow closer—inside the newsroom and out.

Critical Introduction

This master's thesis consists of selections from my historical novel: *The Milwaukee Tavern.* Set in Oklahoma beginning in late 1969, the project features dual protagonists. Elaine Russell is a young, Black closeted lesbian woman recently hired on as a reporter for a Tulsa area broadcast news station, and Wendy Webster is a young white woman who has been working at the news station for a few years and aspires to become an anchor. Elaine must navigate the racism and sexism in her new workplace as she strives to help bring fair and comprehensive news coverage to the Black and Gay liberation movements. Wendy reckons with the new responsibilities of a promotion, discovers her own sexual identity, negotiates her relationship with the idea of liberation. Despite their differences, the women are drawn to one another and grow closer—inside the newsroom and out.

The work on my thesis began during the Spring 2020 semester in Professor Rilla Askew's class, "Historical Fiction Writing." Since then, one of the authors whose novels I have been reading the most, and whose influence I see in my own writing, is Louise Erdrich. As I have worked over the last year, I have discovered that there are several aspects to Erdrich's writing that I admire and have found myself attempting to emulate: character development, point of view, and exploration of place.

First, the wholeness that Erdrich imbues every one of her characters with inspired me to strive to ensure that my two protagonists feel fully fleshed out and realistic, and that even the side characters and foils seem as though they could walk off the page and continue their own independent lives. I hold each woman in my mind clearly. They have grown along with the project and, while they are separate and independent characters, it is their relationship with one another that is most compelling to me. On the page, they have grown together and, on occasion,

have surprised even me in the things they say and do. While other characters in this story don't take center stage like Elaine and Wendy, it is my goal to ensure that they feel just as real. Raymond Walker stands out as my third favorite character in this project. He is the only other Black employee at the news station and becomes a great friend to Elaine, and eventually Wendy as well. In many ways, he represents a specific Black experience in Tulsa.

Point of view is another craft element that Erdrich inspired me to play with. In every one of her books I have read, she alternates point of view. Sometimes the shifts are clearly denoted by chapters, while others are more subtle and appear in language and tone changes. Additionally, in Professor Askew's "Writing Historical Fiction" class, I read Hilary Mantel's historical novel *Wolf Hall*. In the book, Mantel uses an extremely close third person point of view—so close that point of view character is often just referred to simply as "him" or "he." Throughout *The Milwaukee Tavern*, I alternate between the perspectives of Elaine and Wendy in close third point of view, which allows the reader to encounter the setting and the other characters through different lenses. In 1969 Oklahoma, there are many complicating social factors in the lives of these two women: gender, race, class, labor, and sexuality. By juxtaposing these characters and letting them interact on the page, my intention is to allow the reader to better understand the nuances among and between the experiences of women in Oklahoma. In *The Milwaukee Tavern*, these perspective shifts are not explicitly labeled, but the language itself—the way the two women think and see the world around them—makes it clear who is the point of view character. As a fashionable, progressive white woman, Wendy notes what people are wearing and frequently casts judgements on those choices. Conversely, Elaine is much more focused on what people are doing, how they're doing it, and finding out why (see pages 25 and 28, respectively).

Another important craft element employed in these selections is the integration of relevant historical detail into the setting and plot. In Professor Askew's "Writing Historical Fiction" class, I saw this method first-hand in Colson Whitehead's *The Underground Railroad* and realized that one of the most efficient ways to impart a sense of era is through clothing. I found historical details in newspaper archives, digitized photographs, and old news footage. On page 25, even as she is frantic from arriving late to work, Wendy notices her friend's "sleeveless salmon jumpsuit." This observation works on two levels: it gives the reader and idea of what Wendy's friend looks like standing in the room and who she is—a working woman in the 1970s.

Through my research, I've also realized how the inescapable influence of race is particularly important in Tulsa, not only due to the 1921 Greenwood Massacre, but also because of the conspiracy of silence that plagued the city for decades afterward. I learned about the strategic damage inflicted upon Black communities across the country during the decades of Urban Renewal or "Negro Removal" programs. While these specific historical events do not drive key elements in the plot, they do influence how these characters move on a day-to-day basis in their city. On page 23, when Elaine and Raymond cover a service and march for the second anniversary of Martin Luther King Jr.'s assassination at Mount Zion Baptist Church, the singing of the marchers is almost drowned out by the sound of the noisy, recently finished Interstate-244, which runs over Elgin Street in downtown Tulsa. Moments like this stand out as representations of the resilience present in Black communities like Greenwood.

During my research, I was able to dive into queer history in Oklahoma. There is relatively little known about the history of Tulsa's LGBTQ+ community. Two of my most surprising sources were a blog written by an aging gay man who was attempting to document what he remembered about the gay night life in Tulsa, and a website dedicated to recovering

"lost womyn" spaces. The title of my novel is derived from the name of a lesbian bar that existed in Tulsa in the 1950s. The place where the bar existed, around 15th and Cincinnati, was also a victim of the aforementioned Urban Renewal so all physical traces of it have been destroyed. Because so little has been documented about these places in Tulsa, I have drawn on research regarding gay and lesbian bars in other cities to craft the Milwaukee Tavern that Elaine and Wendy visit.

The body of this thesis consists of significant excerpts from *The Milwaukee Tavern* and features interludes of summary and contextualizing information. I chose these sections, instead of simply providing the first fifty to seventy pages of the project, to provide my thesis committee with an illuminating snapshot of the novel's plot, characters, and era.

The first excerpt is from Chapter Twelve, the scene where Elaine and Raymond cover a service at Mount Zion Baptist church. In this scene, it is my intention to showcase the friendship growing between Elaine and Raymond, but also draw stark lines around their respective experiences. Elaine's status as an outsider is emphasized in several ways. First, I utilize flashback to show the reader the last time Elaine attended church with her family back in Chicago. This flashback also serves to highlight the growing rift between Elaine and her younger brother, LJ. The second way I bring attention to Elaine's identity as an outsider is an interaction with another young Black woman to whom Elaine finds herself attracted. Though she recognizes the feeling as attraction, Elaine is conflicted as she is reminded not only of her physical presence in the church, but also her role as a reporter. The third way I highlight Elaine's outsider status is through her first meeting with members of the Black Panther Party, Melvin and Eddie. Though the encounter isn't completely friendly, it sends Elaine down a path towards more overt activism.

In this excerpt, I also attempt to highlight the diversity within the Black experience—something often ignored by the white mainstream histories. In portraying these critical intricacies, I found myself looking to James Baldwin's novel *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* and the nuances Baldwin instills between the experiences of all the Black men in the book: Leo Proudhammer, the actor; his brother Caleb, the veteran turned preacher; their father, an immigrant; and Leo's lover, Christopher the activist. In contrasting Elaine's and Raymond's reactions, I highlight the difference in their experiences and how those nuances influence their perception of the world. As a born and bred Tulsan, Raymond knows the story of Greenwood and understands the potential danger that Black Panthers could bring to his community. He is therefore far more cautious of the assistance offered by Melvin and Eddie. Elaine receives the Panthers with more openness, in part because she is unaware of Tulsa's bloody history and also because Eddie reminds her of her younger brother. I chose this chapter to begin the thesis because it is one of the only spaces that is entirely Black, and I believe it offers unique insight into Elaine's character and relationships with other Black characters.

The next excerpt picks up in Wendy's perspective the day after the May 4th Kent State Massacre. The scene serves as an anchoring point for Wendy's character as she begins to realize her feelings for Elaine are stronger than she initially thought. This addition demonstrations how point-of-view shifts in the novel are indicated not by separate chapters but by gliding seamlessly between one perspective to another. Additionally, although at this point in the novel most of the action is occurring directly around Elaine, it's important for the reader to know that Wendy's story hasn't stopped.

I chose the OU demonstration scene for the main focal point of the thesis because it highlights the racism, sexism, and political climate of the era. I discovered the history, details,

and aftermath of this demonstration-turned-riot while I was reading Dr. George Henderson's book, *Race and the University*: *A Memoir*. Inspired by the experiences that Dr. Henderson recounts as the first Black man to own property in Norman, I wanted to capture the tumultuousness of the work Elaine and Raymond are doing, in this time and place by integrating key historical details. On page 29, I include the specific style of the television camera Raymond uses. A page later, through dialogue, I reference specific chants that were popular at the time. Through the actions of an abusive Highway Patrolman and the ever-changing weather, I demonstrate how Oklahoma exerts its influence upon this scene. Ultimately, I selected this chapter for the thesis because it provides a wider, more complex view of Oklahoma's history.

I was hesitant to write a "coming out" scene for Elaine, especially one that involves a man. Too often in fiction, coming out scenes are contrived, predictable, and overly emotional. I utilized historical detail to push the tension of this scene. In 1970, an unmarried man and woman would not share a hotel room and this fact pushes Raymond to ask why Elaine agreed to the arrangement. Additionally, I use this moment to subvert the romantic trope that often sees two characters forced into sharing a room and/or bed with one another. The scene also highlights important histories of solidarity and intersectionality. I include reference to Huey P. Newton's support of the LGBTQ+ community, which simultaneously evokes era and complicates Raymond's character, and inspires his full acceptance of Elaine. Another reason I chose this chapter was Wendy's first foray into the titular lesbian bar: *the Milwaukee Tavern*. This scene is intended to contrast with Elaine's coming out scene. While Elaine has fully embraced her identity and shared it with others, Wendy is taking some of her first steps in her own personal journey. This highlights the fact that, even within the narrative of Gay Liberation, the stories and identities of queer women—particularly queer women of color—are excluded and forgotten.

I conclude these selections with Chapter Eighteen, which takes place entirely in Wendy's point of view. This chapter highlights a major moment in Wendy's character development. She takes a more serious career risk, followed by a great personal risk in the processing of her feelings for Elaine. I also wanted the reader to witness Elaine's growth through Wendy's eyes. Consequently, this chapter serves as a pivotal moment for the women to recognize one another other in a deeper, more meaningful way.

Louise Erdrich's body of work also, in a sense, serves as documentation of her journey in learning more about her home, her people, and their shared history. Though I grew up in Tulsa, I have learned far more about my home city while writing this novel than I ever did in high school or during my time as an undergraduate. This novel and its necessary research have helped me better understand the place that I call home and reconnect with it in new, more meaningful ways.

As I began this project, I found myself inspired by the Oklahoma writers I met at the 2020 AWP Conference in San Antonio—Constance Squires and Brandon Hobson. In conversations with them and in their published work, they showcase their own unique versions of Oklahoma through memorable characters that feel familiar. With this project, I hope to achieve the same. Lastly, through their work and their teachings, each person on my committee has inspired me over the course of my academic career and, subsequently, influenced this project. Professor Rilla Askew demonstrated how place can be just as influential a character as the protagonist. Dr. Catherine John Camara expressed the importance of understanding history's indelible influence on the present. Dr. Susan Kates opened my eyes to the vastly different perspectives of Oklahoma from insiders to outsiders. Following in their footsteps, I hope to join their work in telling the stories of women that are too often excluded from the mainstream narrative and lost to history.

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Background and Synopsis of Preceding Chapters

Set in Oklahoma beginning in December of 1969, *Milwaukee Tavern* features dual protagonists: Elaine Russell, a young, Black closeted lesbian recently hired on as a reporter for a Tulsa area broadcast news station, and Wendy Webster, a white reporter who has been working at the news station for a few years and aspires to sit behind the anchor desk. Thrown together inside the newsroom and out, Elaine works to help bring fair and comprehensive news coverage to the Black and Gay liberation movements while Wendy discovers her own identity and relationship with liberation. The novel alternates between their perspectives so that the reader might better understand the nuances among and between the two women and, more broadly, the experiences of women in Oklahoma's history.

Chapter One: In Tulsa, Oklahoma, Wendy Webster, a young white woman, works as lifestyle correspondent for the K-TOT news station, but aspires to be an anchor. Elaine Russell, a young Black woman and recent college graduate, interviews for job at the K-TOT station with the Director of News, Frank Wilkinson.

Chapter Two: Elaine is hired as a reporter and gets into trouble after venturing out alone on her first story. Wendy fills in when the lead anchor quits just before the six o'clock broadcast and impresses everyone.

Chapter Three: Wendy is confirmed as the new six o'clock anchor and thrives in her new role. Meanwhile, Elaine resents some of her assignments and brings her concerns to Frank about the image they are crafting of North Tulsa. Her concerns are dismissed, and she goes to Raymond, the only other Black employee in the station, for advice. The K-TOT station co-hosts the Oklahoma News Association Christmas gala at the Camelot Inn, which brings in the station's Washington Correspondent, Charles DuPont. Wendy attends the gala with DuPont, but their flirtation is brief.

Chapter Four: After working overtime, Elaine presents the Executive Producer, Peggy Van Buren, with several ideas for special pieces but gets shot down. After reading about Angela Davis's arrest, she decides to look more into Black Panther activity in the area and suggests the station should cover it. Raymond warns her against highlighting Black Panthers, so Elaine turns to integration of Tulsa Public Schools. She begins by interviewing the Principal of Booker T. Washington Highschool.

Chapter Five: Elaine upsets the TPS superintendent during a joint interview with Wendy, which gets them both in trouble with Frank. Elaine almost gets fired and Wendy is also held partially accountable. Peggy asks Wendy to "keep an eye" on Elaine and Wendy agrees.

Chapter Six: *The Tulsa Tribune* publishes an anonymous opinion piece about TPS integration that is filled with thinly veiled racism. Elaine brings it to Frank and insists that they run her integration story. He agrees to air a short, carefully worded report on the current state of integration but with a focus the good that TPS's progress is doing for the students.

Chapter Seven: Wendy becomes a local celebrity as she establishes herself as a star anchor. She tries to keep an eye on Elaine and occasionally goes out to report on small stories.

Elaine has kept her head down for several weeks. While watching the news, Elaine notices the wording of her integration story has been changed.

Chapter Eight: While reporting on a story about embezzlement, Elaine and Rob Landry, a cameraman, get detained. Landry bails himself out but doesn't have enough cash for Elaine as well and returns to the station for help. Knowing that Elaine is on thin ice already, Wendy goes back to the courthouse with Landry and they bail her out. A Tulsa tabloid gets a picture of Elaine's being bailed out and the story of K-TOT's "jailbird journalist" dominates the local news that night. Frank and Peggy decide the publicity could help the station and promote Elaine to "Eyewitness Correspondent." Elaine and Wendy begin a tentative friendship.

Chapter Nine: In her new role, Elaine reports on her first special segment on the "eclipse of the century" and covering a local watch party on top of the old Tulsa Tribune building. Wendy arrives to keep an eye on Elaine, but she claims she was invited. She tries to give a nervous Elaine some advice, but both end up getting frustrated. A couple days later, Elaine's apartment floods and Wendy surprises them both by offering up her couch. Elaine ends up staying a few days and, when she moves into her new apartment, she lends Wendy her copy of *Invisible Man*.

Chapter Ten: Over the following weekend, Elaine is visited by her mother, Lorraine, and younger brother, LJ. She learns from her brother is now a full-fledged member of the Black Panther Party back in Chicago. He tells her that the BPP is interested in expanding to Tulsa—specifically to Greenwood. Their mother discourages them from any extreme actions and warns that "Tulsa ain't the city for it." LJ seems to take this as a challenge and, later, tells Elaine he will reach out to the Kansas City chapter to see if they can send anyone down.

Chapter Eleven: Elaine drops her family off at the airport and they return to Chicago. She calls Raymond and tells him about the Black Panther Party's interest in Tulsa. He expresses excitement but also concern.

Chapter Twelve

Elaine hesitated at the doorstep of the church, just long enough to breathe in and out, but the pause did not escape notice. Raymond was a few steps ahead and glanced back at her, looking over the shoulder that wasn't balancing a bulky camera case.

"You all right?" he asked as an agitated parishioner ducked under his elbow.

She stepped quickly past him and, gesturing at the light colored bricks and glinting stained glass, said, "Just admiring the architecture." If he detected her lie, he was merciful enough to leave her alone.

Though they had arrived at Mount Zion Baptist Church over an hour in advance of the scheduled service, the sanctuary was already bustling and nearing its normal Sunday capacity. Two years had passed since Dr. King's death and, on this Sunday, across the nation, people flocked to churches to remember him and rededicate themselves to preserving his legacy.

"I'm gonna go set up the camera." Raymond jabbed his thumb up at one of the twin balconies. She looked up to find one other cameraman from another news station; the white man looked bored as he fidgeted with the dials and switches on the side of the camera. "I'll meet you back down here after the service so we can interview Reverend McCutchen." Raymond looked at Elaine for several seconds before he turned and headed for the stairs.

It had been nearly a year to the day since Elaine had stepped inside a church. The last time had been Easter Sunday service the previous year, during a visit to her mother back in Chicago. Her mother had insisted Elaine wear a dress she'd made—a ruffled mint green thing with a high, itchy collar. Elaine refused until her mother pursed her lips, arched an eyebrow, and asked, "You too grown to wear somethin' your mama made?" After pulling it on, Elaine had refused to look at herself in a mirror. Her younger brother, LJ, laughed, standing in the doorway in a well-fitting suit. He was not so little anymore. His height now matched her own and his features had grown long, sharpened out of the baby fat. She found herself missing the days when they were young, and he stumbled on little legs in her footsteps as they ran through their neighborhood. Scowling at him, she muttered a string of curses that made his eyes go wide and sent him from the room in embarrassment. They didn't exchange a glance the whole walk to the church and, just as their mother seemed to catch onto the strange air between them, they were surrounded by neighbors and distant family. It was a joyful occasion, all the church mothers kept insisting, a long awaited homecoming. The dress and the attention had nearly suffocated her.

Standing in the corner of the Mount Zion sanctuary, Elaine straightened her blazer and glanced around the rapidly filling room. The burgundy carpet was trampled flat by the faithful and the three columns of chestnut pews, though sturdy, had lost their initial shine. Men wore somber black suits while the women wore their Sunday best, though the usual brilliant colors were muted to shades and tints to reflect the occasion. Younger people stood along the sides of the room and behind the last row of pew, reserving the seats for community elders. Though Elaine's dark clothes fit the somber occasion, her blazer and flared slacks caught the attention of several church mothers. She did her best to ignore the long, unashamed looks.

Someone bumped Elaine's hip—not hard enough to knock her off balance but enough to warrant an apology. She turned to find another young woman, halfway bent over, reaching for the shoes straps that stretched over her toes.

"Sorry," the woman said as she stood upright again. "Trying to break these in, but they're breaking me." She was wearing a loose, black chiffon dress and the aforementioned heels looked like torture devices to Elaine. It was an outfit, she realized, that reminded her of Wendy.

"No harm, no foul," she hurried to say, realizing that she had been staring at the woman, rather openly. It was difficult not to admire the graceful line of her broad nose or the smoothness of her rich complexion or the fullness of her lips. Feeling heat bloom across her cheeks and the back of her neck, Elaine angled her shoulders toward the pulpit.

"Hold on. Have we met?"

"No, I don't think so."

"I swear I've seen you before—"

Rumbling conversation around the sanctuary came to a halt around them as the bespectacled Reverend McCutchen slowly made his way from the back of the church, through the tightly packed crowd, towards the pulpit. Every couple of steps, someone stopped him to shake hands and exchange a proper good morning.

Most of the assembled congregation had taken to fanning themselves against the rising heat. From her spot towards the back of the church, the motion rippled through the crowd in strange, almost synchronized waves. Elaine resisted the urge to remove her blazer, knowing it would only draw more stares, and resigned to fanning herself with the pages of her notepad. Standing before his community, the reverend gripped the edge of the lectern and bowed his head.

It had been years since Elaine had prayed. She had occasionally attended church while she was enrolled at the University of Oklahoma. Whenever she made it to a sanctuary, she bowed her head and sang along, but it was a performance necessary to prevent suspicion of her preferred romantic company.

She tucked her chin to her chest but snuck glances at the reverend over the rim of her glasses. The Reverend was clad in a dark pinstripe suit and his wrinkled forehead was already slick with perspiration. He spoke without a microphone, but his insistent baritone filled the air, the timbre resonant in Elaine's ears.

"Heavenly Father, we stand humbly before you on this day to remember and celebrate our dear Brother Martin. Words cannot properly express how we miss him, his leadership, his calming presence, his unyielding compassion and understanding."

"Amen!" a church mother cried out as she fanned herself in the front row.

"Yes, we miss him every day, but we know his spirit is with you, Lord, baskin' in the glory of your Heavenly home. And though the temptation to wallow in sorrow can be overwhelming, we must remember that is nothin' but a trick of the Enemy."

The Reverend's words evoked more shouts from the congregation, punctuated by a couple of staccato claps.

"We must also remember what Brother Martin stood for, what he believed in, what he dreamed about. Lord, we ask that you use each and every one of us here to continue that honorable work."

"Won't He do it!" The testimony came from the balcony.

"Won't He will!"

"Yes, He will! Anoint us with an outpouring of your unconditional love so that we may bless this morning with your Heavenly name. Amen."

"Amen!" cried the congregation.

"Good morning," the Reverend said, looking out over the crowd.

"Good morning," responded the congregation.

"Rest on your feet, now. The choir's got somethin' special for us today."

The congregation rose and the choir of twenty filed in, rustling in their stiff black robes, and stepped up onto the risers behind the pulpit. The organ player began a mournful tune that Elaine couldn't place. Though it was late in the morning, the congregation seemed to slumber. After several bars of introduction, the church mothers were in tears and the choir leader broke out into the wailing lyrics: "Precious Lord, take my hand! Lead me on, let me stand!"

The rest of the choir joined in, followed shortly by the congregation booming the chorus. The leader, evidently moved by the Holy Spirit, repeated the chorus several times in a row. Elaine lost track of the repetition by the time the song ended.

Reverend McCutchen stepped up again to announce the slate of speakers for the event, the songs to be sung in between, and remind everyone of the march that would take place along Elgin shortly after the service. Elaine quickly jotted down the names in her notebook, glancing up when she recognized one. Principle Whitlow was the third speaker. When it was his turn to take the pulpit nearly an hour later, he gripped the edges of the lectern and spoke with the same conviction that Elaine remembered from their interview.

"As Brother Martin said, the arc of the universe bends toward justice." The sentiment earned hopeful shouts of affirmation. "We must have faith that it does…but we cannot forget that *faith without works is dead*. Amen?"

"Amen!"

"Now, I believe our city council and our mayor have demonstrated a willingness to change. We've started with the roots, but we must continue to push up the trunk, all the way up to the very top of the tree." He implored the congregation to make their voices heard, not only by the local leaders, but also state leaders, and national representatives. Elaine wondered if he would be willing to sit down afterward to talk about the service and his speech, or if he had labeled her as trouble to be avoided.

The rest of the speakers varied, in their content, temper, and length of speech. Some used their time slot to read their favorite selections from Dr. King's speeches and writings, while others re-eulogized him. As the morning stretched on, Elaine watched the sun's rays shimmering and refracting through the stained glass windows. The sanctuary warmed and the congregation melted together.

Finally, Reverend McCutchen reclaimed the pulpit for the last time.

"We will leave you with a song today. One that has carried us through trials and tribulations before. One that will carry us all the way to Heaven."

The choir leader rose to her feet and sang out: "Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' forth to carry me home!"

The congregation joined in as the choir drove the tempo a bit faster, swaying and clapping, and the melody was everywhere and everything. It reverberated from the stained glass high above Elaine's head to the old floorboards beneath her feet. Infected by the music and the atmosphere, she found herself singing along, her hands marking the beat. With each repetition of the chorus, the heat in the room intensified, in the air, in their hearts, in their minds. Elaine watched others thrust their hands in the air, tilt their heads back, surrender their sorrows. The

crescendo of the final chorus frenzied the people, until the final chord rang in the air—hanging over their heads for an eternity.

"Amen," the reverend called out. The crowd responded in kind, concluding the service.

People poured out of the stifling space, into the cool spring morning. Elaine waited until the strongest current of people passed before stepping forward and lowering herself into the last pew. She caught a glimpse of Raymond up in the balcony; he seemed preoccupied with the Marconi camera he had set up on a tripod. Several church leaders and a couple speakers from the event lingered near the pulpit, swarmed by handshakes, gratitude, and prayer requests. Elaine didn't see Principle Whitlow and bit back her disappointment. Instead, she pulled her notepad from her pocket and began reviewing her notes for the story.

"Excuse me, miss?"

Elaine looked up two find two men standing in the aisle, watching her. Both boasted picked out afros. The older of the two looked to be in his earlies thirties and wore a black suit while the younger was clad in a black leather jacket and couldn't have been much older than LJ.

"Elaine Russell, right?" The one in the suit asked.

She narrowed her eyes at him, tilted her head, and asked, "Who wants to know?"

Despite the sharpness of her tone, the man smiled good-naturedly. His younger companion regarded Elaine with a stony expression, though the youthful roundness of his face betrayed the manufactured sternness.

"Relax, sister," he said and shuffled into the row in front of hers and extended his hand. As he leaned closer, Elaine caught a whiff of Afro Sheen. "I'm Melvin Bridgewater." He gestured to his companion. "And this young brother behind me is Eddie Hamilton."

Elaine glanced between the two men and tried to figure the significance of Melvin's tone. She didn't recognize their faces, nor their names. Arching an eyebrow at their expectant expressions, she asked, "So did you have somethin' to say or did you need some extra time with the Lord?"

Melvin chuckled and took a seat in the front of her. Twisting around in the pew, he said, "I see where Lawrence gets his temperament."

Elaine's chest tightened and she regarded the men with a more critical eye. Melvin's black suit no longer felt mournful—it was proud and defiant. She looked at Eddie, at the militancy of his stance, at the angle of his chin, and at the bulge under his leather jacket. She wondered if he had willingly stuffed the beret in his pocket upon entering the church or if Melvin compelled him to do so out of respect. It then occurred to her that it likely wasn't a beret at all, but something more dangerous. She generally admired the work the Panthers did, but it was the hardness in Eddie's eyes that concerned her. It was the same hardness she had seen in LJ's eyes.

"How do you know my brother?" she asked Melvin.

"We got his message and decided to come check out the scene down here."

"You came all the way from Chicago?"

"Kansas City," he corrected her patiently. "We were hopin' to test out the waters over the next several weeks. See what the community needs and figure out what we can do to help. Your brother said you've got your finger on the pulse of the city." His gaze was kind but perceptive. Elaine felt it moving over her face as she anticipated his question. "You think you could help us with that?"

Elaine thought of the poverty she had seen during her reporting on the north side of the city. She thought about the Tulsa Public School district and, despite her numerous reports on the

situation, its glacial pace of integration. She also considered the potential danger—the assumed guilt that would accompany her association with the men. If anyone at K-TOT found out, she'd be kicked to the curb faster than she could say *Black Panther Party*.

"I'm not exactly in a position to help you cause trouble," Elaine decided aloud.

Something between frustration and disappointed briefly flashed across Melvin's features.

"C'mon, don't play like that, little sister. You know it's not about causin' trouble. It's about helpin' our people." His expression rivaled the seriousness of Eddie's until, as if he couldn't stand not smiling, it cracked into a smirk. "But if a few white men get their feathers ruffled in the process, so be it."

Elaine suppressed a shiver as a chilly spring gust swept through the sanctuary. She shifted her weight in the creaking pew.

"Rufflin' feathers down here gets to be a lot more dangerous."

"White men don't scare us," Eddie said. He was still standing, stubbornly, in the aisle.

Looking at him, Elaine remembered the advice she had given her brother after a neighborhood bully threatened to beat him up. They had always walked to school together until they reached the corner where they had to part ways—she turned right for the middle school and he turned left for the elementary. He tried to conceal the fear, but she saw it in his eyes, in the trembling of his hands. She kept her expression stern as she looked at Eddie and repeated the advice that she'd given her brother years earlier: "You ain't gotta be afraid. You gotta be aware. You gotta be smart."

"Exactly," Melvin said. "We're already on the same page."

"Why do you need my help?" Elaine looked down at her hands in her lap. "Talk to the Reverend—anyone in this building would be more helpful."

"We need your voice," Melvin said. "If we can get somethin' goin' down here—a breakfast program or clinic—we'll need help spreadin' the word. We believe you're in a unique position to do so. You see any brothers or sisters down here that got their own segment on the six o'clock news?"

"No, but my stories have to get approved. I can't just—"

"Elaine?" She leapt up from the pew at her name and found Raymond standing a few feet away. The camera, still attached to the tripod, was balanced on one shoulder. His brow furrowed in concern as he registered the two Panthers.

Elaine realized the sanctuary had emptied entirely.

"Who are you?" Eddie demanded, sizing him up.

Raymond looked at the young man, at his stance and his leather jacket, and Elaine watched the usual gentleness in his expression harden. His eyes refocused on her and he asked, "Are you all right?"

She opened her mouth to reassure him, but Melvin spoke first. "We're just tryna help out our sister here with a career opportunity."

Irritation panged in Elaine's stomach and, looking back over her shoulder at Melvin in the pew, she asked, "Who's helpin' who again?"

He conceded, "It would be mutually beneficial."

"Well," Raymond said and cleared his throat. "We've got to go cover the march."

"Did you cover the march for Chairman Hampton?" Eddie asked sharply.

Without sparing a glance at the young man, Raymond said, "This isn't Chicago and, as she already mentioned, we don't pick the stories. That's out of our control."

The fact that Raymond wouldn't look Eddie in the eye seemed to only provoke him further. He sucked his teeth and took a threatening step forward. "You down with the liberation of our people? Or not?"

"Do you realize that jacket doesn't make you grown?" Raymond set down the camera equipment and matched Eddie's stance. "If it did, you'd know how to behave here."

Elaine stepped into the aisle between the two men, glaring at Raymond for escalating the situation. Melvin forced a feeble laugh and turned to face Eddie. He held out a hand for peace and said, "Alright, Eddie, settle down. We aren't here to pick a fight with our own people."

"The march is leaving soon," Raymond said. He kept his eyes on Eddie. "You probably should too. Don't want to attract any unnecessary attention."

"Sounds like a plan, brother." Melvin rose from the pew, buttoned his suit jacket, and took one more moment to reassure Elaine: "We'll be in touch." He nodded respectfully at Raymond as stepped out of the row and headed for the door.

"Power to the people," Eddie declared with his fist raised above his head. He gave Raymond a final glare before falling into step behind Melvin.

Elaine scooped up one of the equipment bags and said, "The march won't film itself." She stepped out of the church and took a deep breath of fresh air.

Raymond's usually affable, comforting silence suddenly seemed stifling and Elaine tried to focus on anything but him. In front of the church, he set the camera down on its tripod and set to aiming and zooming the lenses. A little further down Elgin street, the crowd looked anxious to begin the march. They would make their way south, underneath the newly constructed Interstate. Elaine spotted Reverend McCutchen and the other speakers mingling at the head of the

gathering. Someone struck up a rendition of “Lift Ev’ry Voice and Sing” in the meantime. Despite the din of the overpass, their voices joined together and carried up and down the street.

“So,” Raymond finally said, squinting into the viewfinder. “What the hell are the Panthers doing in Tulsa?”

“They want to set up some programs around here.”

“Why were they talking to you?”

“They need my help.” Anticipation loosened her joints.

Raymond regarded her with concern and, though he seemed scared of the answer, asked, “You thinkin’ about joinin’ up?”

The crowd began its march down the center of the street towards Greenwood.

“No.” Elaine shook her head. “Not yet anyway.”

Interlude Chapter Synopses

Chapter Thirteen: Wendy finishes *Invisible Man* and Elaine convinces her to call in sick to work in order to attend a reading by Ralph Ellison at the University of Oklahoma. The event brings the women closer and pushes Wendy outside the boundary of her white world. Elaine introduces Wendy to Will Meyers, an old friend from OU's Afro-Student Union.

Chapter Fourteen: Wendy hosts a party with friends and coworkers, where she introduces her neighbor, Kathleen, to Elaine. Kathleen and Elaine end up hitting it off, which irritates Wendy and forces her to acknowledge the growing feelings she harbors for Elaine. After several weeks pass without a call, Elaine begins to lose hope in Melvin and Eddie following through on their plans and becomes more desperate for change.

Chapter Fifteen: Elaine reveals to Wendy that she believes someone is censoring her stories and asks for her help getting her real stories on the air. Citing the great risk, Wendy rejects Elaine's idea. The Kent State Massacre makes national news and Elaine and Raymond sneak off to Norman to cover the subsequent student demonstrations at OU. Wendy grapples with both her growing feelings for Elaine and her concern that Elaine's risk taking will get them both into serious trouble.

Chapter Sixteen

The next morning, Wendy tucked her purse into the crook of her arm, checked her watch, and swore at the elevator's glacial pace. Only a few moments separated her from the communal heckling saved for those who arrived late to the morning meeting. The elevator emitted a merciful ding as it reached the sixth floor and released her into the bullpen. She tossed her purse into her chair, grabbed the legal pad she always kept in the top drawer, and slipped into the conference room just as Frank began to close the door. To her dismay, the only seat available was the one immediately adjacent to the Director of News himself and opposite Peggy. Wendy scanned the group, silently imploring someone to sacrifice their spot, but she only received an apologetic shrug from June, who leaned against the back wall in her sleeveless salmon jumpsuit, sandwiched between Landry and a new junior producer.

"Did you have something to say, Wendy?" Frank asked.

"No," she said and, without ceremony, plopped down into the chair.

"All right." He clasped his hands together and glanced around the room. He frowned. "Where the hell is Russell?"

Wendy followed suit and scanned the room. She thought Elaine might be in the bathroom or in the breakroom getting another mugful of coffee. One of the producers spoke up: "Haven't seen her this morning."

Wendy swallowed and peered up at Frank to gauge his reaction. His square jaw was clenched. She could see the vein in his temple pulsing.

"Actually, she called in sick," Peggy corrected the record.

Wendy blinked in surprise. Over the six months or so Elaine had been working at the station, the only time she had ever called in sick was when she and Wendy had made the trip down to Norman to hear Ralph Ellison speak the week prior. Normally, she was one of the first in the office and often stayed after the six o'clock broadcast.

The day before, when the news about the violence at Kent State broke, Wendy had seen Elaine talking to someone over the telephone. She closed her eyes, pressed her fingertips to her temples, and tried to recall any bits and pieces of the conversation she overheard—but the meeting around her was districting.

The sound producer interjected, "Raymond also called in sick."

A wave of murmurs rippled through the room. Wendy's eyes snapped open and she glanced over at June, who waggled her eyebrows, adjusted her leopard print ascot, and mouthed the words *I told you so*. Fixing her gaze on her legal pad, Wendy tried to think about anything but Elaine and Raymond together.

"Is there any slack that needs picking up?" Frank asked the producers, trying to talk over the rumors percolating throughout the staff.

"Elaine was ahead of schedule with all her stories."

"Raymond must have stayed late last night. All his audio is ready to go."

With each new piece of information, Frank's complexion deepened another shade of red. That vein pulsed even faster in his temple. He cleared his throat, looked back down assignment sheet before him, and said gruffly, "Let's move on."

Wendy stole a glance across the table at Peggy and noticed the corner of her wrinkled mouth twitch. As if she sensed that she was being watched, Peggy hardened her features and met Wendy's gaze. She looked back down at her legal pad as Frank talked through the day's assignments. She could only imagine the trouble Elaine was getting herself into, especially since she had grown more resolute in her suspicions about the censorship of her stories and more desperate in her attempts to prove it. As Wendy reflected on her last conversation with Elaine, guilt weighed heavily in her stomach. She had expected the cold shoulder for a day or two, but she hadn't anticipated being frozen out entirely.

#

Raymond's long legs were cramped in the passenger seat of Elaine's cherry red Corvair as they neared the Oklahoma City limits. He glanced at his watch, ran a hand over his face, and sighed, "Well, it's meetin' time."

"You could've turned me down," Elaine reminded him. He laughed once and steadied the precarious pile of camera equipment between them as the car swayed in Elaine's evasion of a pothole.

"We both know you wouldn't have taken no for an answer," he said.

Elaine offered a noncommittal shrug and kept her eyes on the road.

"My only regret is that we won't be there to see the look on Wilkinson's face when he puts two and two together."

"He might actually bust a blood vessel," he said, earning a genuine laugh. Then, in a more serious tone, he asked, "You sure we can trust this source of yours?"

Elaine nodded, but gripped the steering wheel a bit tighter.

"Will was in the Afro-Student Union with me." She lightened her foot on the accelerator as the car passed a rest stop with an Oklahoma Highway Patrol car in the lot. She watched the black and white car in the rear view—waiting for it to pull out behind them with its lights flashing—until it disappeared along with the rest stop behind the crest of a hill. "He's doin' good work now as the student body president, gettin' people to work together. He's just about as in the know as you can be."

Raymond hummed like he wasn't completely convinced but, evidently, wasn't concerned enough to press the issue. He must have seen the cop car too. He was still peering into the side mirror, to the sunny horizon at their backs.

Elaine parked the car east of the football stadium among dozens of others in a vast field of patchy grass. She rose from the driver's seat, stretching her back and legs. Raymond began assembling the camera equipment. She leaned in, reached across the seat into the glove box, and grabbed her afro pick—the handle of which was black plastic molded into the shape of a clenched fist. She worked the comb through sections of her hair and watched Raymond prepare the equipment. He slipped his arms through the straps on the metal box containing the recording electronics. The backpack set up was larger than the actual camera he balanced on his shoulder. Instead of the old four turret style, the latest Marconi model featured one large, zoomable lens. Several bulky cords connected the two parts. She watched as Raymond wrangled the whole system with adroit hands. He flipped on the power switch and asked, "Should we film the intro?"

"I suppose," Elaine sighed. She still hadn't gotten used to her new role as Eyewitness Correspondent and its requirement that she stand in front of the camera instead of behind. He

handed her the microphone and stepped a few paces back, ensuring not to disrupt any cords. She gripped the small silver device like a lifeline.

"Drop the script," Raymond instructed gently. "And the bag."

Elaine realized her satchel was still hitched over one shoulder and the introduction she had meticulously typed up was clamped between her fingers. She allowed the bag to slip to the ground, out of frame, and she stared down at the paper, hoping the words would sear themselves into her mind. He squinted at her, through the viewfinder, and gestured she move slightly to her left. She shuffled stiffly according to his instruction, until he offered a thumbs up. She cleared her throat and looked at her tiny reflection in the camera lens.

"We are standing outside the Oklahoma Memorial Stadium at the University of Oklahoma. In response to the massacre of four students at Kent State University yesterday, the local chapter of the People's Liberation Front distributed flyers across campus declaring there would be a demonstration during the ROTC's daily drilling session. This gathering is just one drop in the wave of antiwar protests washing over the country."

"Perfect," Raymond exclaimed from behind the camera. "Ready to head inside?"

Hundreds of students already occupied the stadium when Elaine and Raymond stepped onto the field. It was a familiar sight for Elaine as she watched some students taking seats in the bleachers, preparing to watch whatever action unfolding on the field before them. To her left, one particularly raucous group of students had gathered at the south endzone of Owen Field, where the ROTC cadets were drilling. The branches stood apart, in position and dress. The Army's cadets stood tall in blue jackets. The Air Force wore head to toe khaki. The Navy's bright white uniforms reflected the late morning sun.

The integrated group of students in the endzone milled around and among each other, laughing and chatting. A couple of white male students, long haired and shirtless, gained a better vantage to hurl insults by climbing the H-shaped goal post and balancing on the crossbar. Some students brandished signs. Pairs hoisted up long banners with antiwar slogans or their respective campus organizations—People's Liberation Front and Students for a Democratic Society. She even noticed a few familiar faces from the Afro-Student Union. Elaine searched for black berets and leather jackets but found none. Other signs bore the names of the Kent State victims: Jeffery Miller, Allison Krause, William Schroder, Sandra Scheuer.

On the west sideline, another group of students paced with their own signs, signaling their support for the troops and calling for God's blessing of President Richard Nixon. The group was entirely white—and upper-middle class by the looks of their ties, khaki pants, and summer dresses.

Nervousness tingled beneath the skin at the back of Elaine's neck when she registered the three police cars that were parked on the grass next to the new south side bleachers. A dozen or so white officers stood nearby, some leaning against the cruisers while others took seats in the first row. Relaxed but watchful. Upon closer inspection, Elaine realized that, much like the ROTC cadets, they were a cobbled together force of three jurisdictions—University of Oklahoma Campus Security, City of Norman Police, and Oklahoma Highway Patrol. One towering trooper stood a few rows back, watching the spectacle from the shadow cast by the wide brim of his brown campaign hat.

It dawned on Elaine that there weren't any other news crews. She expected there was likely a reporter from the student newspaper roaming through the crowd, but there wasn't

another camera in sight. Just as she was about to draw their advantage to Raymond's attention, she noticed a familiar figure standing on the outskirts of the gathering.

Brow furrowed and hands stuffed into his pockets, Dr. George Henderson watched the students through a pair of thick-rimmed glasses and under the short brim of his signature flat cap. Elaine couldn't read his eyes from the distance, so she tugged at Raymond's elbow and said, "C'mon. There's someone I want you to meet."

As they approached Dr. Henderson, they found him speaking with Will Meyers. His kind brown eyes turned towards Elaine and lit up in recognition.

"Dr. Henderson!" she exclaimed, smiling widely at him. She shook his hand emphatically. "How are you?"

"I'm good, I'm good," he spoke in his warm, measured voice. "How have you been? We've missed you around the department."

"I'm doing well! I got the job in Tulsa. We're actually here on assignment." She gestured to Raymond next to her. "This is my colleague, Raymond Walker." The two men exchanged a respectful handshake, Raymond bowing his head slightly.

Dr. Henderson squinted at him, trying to recognize his face, and asked, "Were you a student here as well?"

"No, sir. Langston—class of sixty-three."

"Excellent. I've given a few guest lectures up there."

Elaine could feel Will staring at her. When she glanced at him, he was giving her the same charming smile he had flashed when he asked her to OU's first Afro-Student Ball a couple years prior. The smile widened at her attention and he said, "Hello again."

"Will," she replied and abruptly introduced her colleague.

"Good to meet you," Raymond said, standing a little taller.

"Likewise. My brother's actually up at Langston right now."

Elaine took the first opportunity to resume ignoring Will and turned back to Dr. Henderson. She held up the microphone and gestured to the camera.

"Sir, would you mind if we interviewed you about this demonstration?"

He took another quick look at the crowd, adjusting his cap.

"Not at all. What are your questions?"

Elaine grabbed her notepad from her satchel and began prepping her interviewee, while Raymond began filming the students for an establishing shot. He panned across the crowd and zoomed in on the marching ROTC cadets. One student in the South endzone threw a Frisbee over the cadets. The red disc soared high before catching an edge in the wind and plummeting to the grass at the feet of a Navy officer. The Frisbee, much to the disappointment of the demonstrators, did not elicit any kind of reaction.

Raymond fixed the camera on Elaine and Dr. Henderson. After focusing the lens, he gave a thumbs up. Elaine looked into the camera and launched into an impromptu introduction: "I'm standing here with OU Professor, Dr. George Henderson. He's a professor of both Sociology and Education, and he serves as the sponsor for the Afro-Student Union." She angled her face slightly towards him, but kept her shoulders mostly squared with the camera. "Sir, have there been many antiwar protests on campus?" She held the microphone out for him, and he nodded.

"A few. Various student organizations have planned them."

"Is today's demonstration any different?"

"Yes, I think inherently so," he said, nodding with intention, as if he were about to make an important point during a class lecture. "With the news of those poor students up in Ohio, I

think our students here felt like they just had to do something. It's my understanding that this was sort of planned overnight."

"Is the faculty or administration aware of this event today?"

He chuckled, "I guess, I suppose I'm *faculty* and I've seen a few of my colleagues around, so we're relatively aware. I'm not sure what the administration knows, at the moment, but I'm sure they will support their students' freedom of speech and assembly."

"What do the students think about—"

"I'm sorry, Elaine. You know I don't speak *for* my students," Dr. Henderson interrupted good-naturedly and clapped Will on the back. "But Mr. Meyers here has certainly become a spokesperson of sorts for his classmates."

Elaine introduced Will to the camera and asked, "So, Mr. Meyers, what are the students hoping to achieve here?"

"I didn't actually have a part in planning this event today, so I can't speak on that…although there seems to be plenty of passion—plenty of students willing to speak up for what's right." Will smiled, an exceedingly charming expression that had certainly played a part in making him the first black president of the OU Student Association. He spoke earnestly, without sounding naïve. "It's all very encouraging. I've spoken with other leadership from the Student Association and the Afro-Student Union and we will be collaborating to host our own event soon."

Several students had noticed the interview and lined up to give their opinion. Elaine did her best to ensure each person was heard—symbolically and literally. Chanting occasional broke out, reverberating in the stadium: "Hell no, we won't go!"

Other, more raucous chants had to be waited out, so they wouldn't be heard in the background: "One, two, three, four! We don't want your fucking war!"

Elaine passed the microphone around, only occasionally asking questions. One student, a young white man with long hair and a scraggly beard, railed against the blind militancy of the ROTC students. He paused to take a breath and, taking the microphone back, Elaine asked, "And how do you feel this event serves your cause?"

A flash of movement caught Elaine's eye and she turned to get a better look.

One student dashed into the center of the group, a flagpole in hand. The pole bowed in the wind as he ran, like a long match striking alight against the sky. The banner of red and blue flashed a yellow star in the middle—National Liberation Front—VietCong. Elaine's eyes tracked the flag and, when she turned to direct Raymond's focus, found the camera already trained on it. The police seemed to recognize the symbol and its illegality. They moved in, brandishing their batons, and closed off escape. Two campus officers grabbed the student with the flag and dragged him towards the cruisers. She shuddered as the wind changed, along with the temperament of the gathering. Around them, the crowd of students exploded with cries of anger while some of the ROTC cadets broke rank in outrage.

Against her instincts, Elaine turned her back on the spectacle and raised the microphone to her mouth. Raymond, though his expression was wrinkled deeply with concern, adjusted the camera lens to frame her properly. She glanced down at her papers. The words she had typed up sitting in the calm of the office failed to capture the significance of the occasion—the dangerous current buzzing in the air, through all the bodies on the field.

"The assembled student gathering has been dissolved into chaos by—" Someone ran by, clipping shoulders with Elaine, but she continued unfazed. "—An assortment of officers attempting to arrest a student for—"

Rough hands gripped Elaine's shoulders and she shrugged them off. When the hands returned, she whipped around to find the tall trooper looming over her and he barked orders in her face: "Clear the area!" The toxic combination of aftershave, stress sweat, and halitosis burned in her nose.

Holding the microphone up so it would pick up their conversation, Elaine protested, "We're reporters!"

"That camera is agitating the mob," he growled from under his brown felt campaign hat and clamped a hand around her upper arm.

"They're students," she corrected the trooper. Then, in Raymond's general direction, she snapped, "Keep filming!"

But Raymond was already pointing the camera at the ground, taking a couple tentative steps forward, and speaking to the trooper in the calmest tone Elaine had ever heard from him: "Excuse me, Officer. Sir, we have press badges. We're just trying to document—"

The trooper's right hand dropped to his belt and gripped the handle of his holstered revolver, freezing Raymond mid-step. He practically snarled: "No back talk, boy. Camera down. Hands up."

Elaine watched Raymond consider his options, his nostrils flaring and the muscles in his jaw working. He looked at her with an apologetic expression and slowly crouched to the ground, settling the camera gently into the manicured grass and slipping off the straps of the backpacked

recording equipment. He raised his hands to eye level but, when he started to stand again, the trooper ordered him back down: “On your knees, boy.”

“Look!” She exclaimed and stooped to reach for her bag, searching for their ONA badges. “We have a right to be here. Look, here’s our press—”

“I said, clear the area!”

Elaine tightened her grip around the microphone and protested, “You can’t just—”

“Stop resisting!”

The trooper wrenched Elaine’s arms behind her back and a shock of pain shot through her left shoulder as he dragged her towards the edge of the field. He twisted her wrist until she grunted in pain and dropped the microphone. She heard some young woman cry out: “She’s just doing her job, you fucking pig! Let her go!”

The trooper bent Elaine over the short brick wall separating the field from the bleachers. He slammed his body against hers to keep her in place, the impact thoroughly winding her, and ratcheted a pair of cuffs into place. Then, without warning, he spun her around and pressed her to the ground. The cuffs bit into her wrists but the deep ache in her left shoulder troubled her more. She had dislocated the shoulder as a child when attempting an ill-fated cartwheel. Her mother had quickly returned her arm bone to its socket and fitted her with a sling, warning her all the while that a second dislocation would be much easier.

Elaine gave the shoulder a cautious roll and sighed in relief when, instead of the blinding pain she’d experienced as a child, the swollen joint protested only with a dull throb. The trooper cuffed Raymond against the wall, a couple feet away from her, and then trotted back over the shouting mass of students and police.

Back up had arrived in the form of several more police cars and a dozen more officers. The campus police had placed the flag-wielding student inside one of the cruisers parked in the endzone, which whipped his classmates into a frenzy. Before the car could drive off, students tugged at the locked doors and began rocking the cruiser side to side. How the hell would flipping the car over help the student inside?

"Are you all right?" Raymond asked, leaning closer to her.

"I'm fine," Elaine said as she struggled against the cuffs. She tried to pull her hands through, but the trooper had ratcheted them brutally and her shoulder twinged at the awkward, restricted movement. In that infuriatingly calm baritone, Raymond tried to reassure her, "Once everything settles down, they'll look at our press badges and they'll let us leave."

"They should be letting us do our jobs. This can't be legal!"

"Look," he said, his tone measured. "We got some footage, so let's just sit tight. We don't need them to seize it as evidence if that trooper decides to charge us with something."

Elaine looked back at the angry throng. A couple of students had jumped on top of the cruisers and were swinging at the windows with anything they could find—with the sticks from their picket signs, their backpacks, their fists. Another figure jumped on the roof of a car. Will held up his hands, an open and pacifying gesture. Elaine could barely make out the words he was calling out over the heads of his fellow students.

"C'mon, y'all! Don't you know this is exactly what they want from us? They want us to give them a reason to beat us down!" The other students hopped off the car and he continued to speak, his brow shining with perspiration. Even the wind seemed to fall to a respectful whisper. "We can't protest a war abroad when we're waging war at home!" The students around the car stood in silence, the air hot with sweat and guilt.

From her position against the sideline wall, Elaine watched the police take advantage of the moment's peace and their new, bolstered numbers. The officers formed a long line and swept the field of students. Most obeyed and cleared the area, allowing the joint police force to set up a secure perimeter. A dozen or so students required persuading by the officer's Billy-clubs. Finally, Elaine watched the few that still weren't satisfied led away in handcuffs.

Nearly half an hour later, the trooper sauntered over to them, thumbs in his belt loops.

"Now, y'all claimed you were reporters?"

"Yes, sir." Raymond said. "Our press badges are in the camera bag. Both our IDs too."

The trooper reached into the bag, searching each pocket carefully. When he found the press badges, he squinted at them and said, "Didn't know they had Negro reporters in Tulsa."

"We're the first two at our station, K-TOT. Mister Frank Wilkinson will vouch for us."

Elaine wondered if Wilkinson would actually vouch for them, especially since they hadn't exactly acquired permission to make the official trip to Norman. The trooper gave an uninterested hum. He found the press badges and the driver's licenses, glared at them for a few seconds, and continued searching the bag. Elaine bit her cheek when she felt the urge to object. The trooper sighed as if the whole situation bored him, and then dropped their IDs and bag next to them on the ground. He yanked Elaine by the arm up, off the grass, and close to him. Ignoring the fresh wave of pain that emanated from her left shoulder, she finally got a good look at his name plate: Bryant. He narrowed his eyes at her close observation.

"Elaine Russell," he said, memorizing her face with a cold stare. "I suggest you stick to reporting in Tulsa." He twisted her around and unlocked the cuffs.

Elaine trembled. She imagined he thought—or perhaps hoped—it was out of fear, but it was a deep fury that shook her, that flared her nostrils, that clenched her jaw. Despite her pulse

thrumming in her ears, she still heard her mother's words of caution and kept her fists down at her sides. *White men are especially dangerous down there*. She felt Raymond's gentle hand on the inside of her elbow before she heard his words in her ear: "Let's go."

"I can drive," he offered as they walked back to the car.

"I'm fine," Elaine insisted, slipping into the driver's seat.

"Elaine!" a voice called. "Hey! Elaine, wait up!"

She turned to see Will Meyers jogging towards the car. The winds were whipping themselves up again. They pushed and pulled at Will as he moved, making his path to the car winding and unsteady. The dragged thick, rapidly darkening clouds overhead. Elaine cranked her window down and waited for him to catch his breath. He rested a forearm on top of the door, leaned forward, and asked, "Y'all aren't headin' back to Tulsa just yet, are you?"

"We should really get this footage back to the station," Raymond said and patted the camera equipment sitting in the middle of the seat.

"Listen," Will began, taking a deep breath. "I don't think what happened earlier is really representative of our cause—don't think you got the full picture. Would y'all be able to stay until tomorrow mornin'? We're gonna hold a proper event—a real rally with a speaking line up. Henderson and a few other faculty members have already agreed. We'll have some student voices as well. We even sent some people over to President Hollomon's office to see if he'd like to participate."

"I don't know how wise it is for us to stick around," Raymond said, nodding towards the cops patrolling the perimeter of the stadium. "We'd like to get outta here before dark."

Elaine turned to him and implored, "C'mon. If we get more footage, we might be able to pull together a whole special."

"You think Wilkinson will air it?" Raymond asked skeptically.

"Once he sees the footage, he will," she insisted. Then, turning back to Will, she nodded. "We'll be there. When and where?"

"Ten o' clock on the North Oval," he grinned and patted the top of the car twice. "See y'all tomorrow!"

Elaine pulled out of the parking lot, passed a few police cars, and drove north on Jenkins Avenue. Her stomach growled and she asked Raymond, "Hungry?"

"Actually, yes."

They shared a quiet lunch at a diner on Main Street. It was a long, narrow restaurant with a line of booths on one wall and a row of counter seats facing the open kitchen on the other. The air was saturated with heavy grease and light conversation. Periodically, Raymond asked if Elaine was all right and she assured him, each time less patiently, that she was fine. Without any pressing appointments, they sipped black coffee for a long time and watched a spring storm move in. Rain streamed down the windows and made the diner feel more cramped than cozy. Eventually, Elaine requested the checks—separate, she specified—and the waitress raised an eyebrow at Raymond but said nothing.

They found a motel just east of I-35 in North Norman. It was a wide, squat building with a glowing "vacancy" sign and faded crimson paint. Elaine pulled into a spot outside the main office and Raymond protested, "Surely, we can find a better place."

"It'll be fine," she said.

"I can pay," he said over the drumming of the rain on the car's roof.

"You don't need to—"

"Please?" he asked.

"Fine," she said, slipping out of the seat. She shut the car door a little harder than she intended and hurried to the cover of the awning.

The older woman at the front desk was reading an old *Cosmopolitan* magazine and did not look up when Elaine and Raymond entered. Elaine tilted her head slightly to read some of the outrageous blurbs.

Warren Beatty Has Been Wronged

A Gynecologist Tells the Reassuring Truth About the Pill

Are You a Good Lover? – This Quiz Will Tell

She smiled as she thought of the stacks of the same magazine on Wendy's coffee table. Raymond cleared his throat and, smiling politely, said, "We'd like two standard rooms, please."

The woman sighed and set aside her reading.

"How long will you be staying with us? Our standard rate is seven dollars per night," she droned. Her eye flickered between Elaine and Raymond, dropped to Elaine's bare ring finger. "The hourly rate is—"

"One night, please," Raymond said and held out his Master Charge card. The woman frowned and pointed to a handwritten sign taped to the front of the desk—CASH ONLY.

As Raymond reached into his wallet, she said, "We only have one room available right now—a double."

Raymond looked at Elaine with concern and she shrugged tiredly. All she wanted to do was get off her feet. The clerk jotted down his information. A moment later, she held out a small key attached to a bright blue tag and said, "All right, Mr. Walker, you'll be in room number eight. Check out by eleven."

Elaine pulled the car in front of the eighth door while Raymond walked from the front office. The room was nicer than Elaine expected. The two full-sized beds were neatly made, and a television sat atop a scratched, but sturdy dresser. There was a small desk in the corner with a telephone and a relatively clean bathroom. They unloaded the camera equipment and stacked it on one side of the room. Raymond turned on the television and switched between the three channels until he settled on a re-run of *Gomer Pyle, USMC*. He turned the volume down when Elaine pulled a book out of her bag, *Giovanni's Room*. After rereading the first paragraph of the chapter three separate times, she realized that she was far too jittery to read. So, she set the book aside and asked, "Is the local news on yet?"

After the local Oklahoma City station finished its five o'clock broadcast, Raymond switched over to the CBS evening news and announced, "I'm gonna take a shower."

Once she heard Raymond turn on the water, Elaine picked up the phone on the desk and asked the operator to make a collect call to the K-TOT station back in Tulsa. Several rings later, it became clear the receptionist had left for the day. She hung up and directly dialed her own desk phone, hoping someone would hear and, not only pick up, but also accept the hefty fee.

The line rang twice, crackling faintly between rings.

Wendy's voice chimed, "Eyewitness News Desk."

"I'd like to call in a tip about a missing reporter," Elaine said, allowing herself to smile.

"Elaine?" Surprise and relief saturated Wendy's tone.

"Is Wilkinson still there?"

"Where the hell did you run off to?"

"Wendy, I need to speak with Wilkinson."

"Let me check." Elaine heard Wendy sigh, set the receiver down, and walk away. In the silence, she heard that noise again—that crackle—like static between channels. A few moments later, Wendy returned with bad news. "Looks like he's gone for the evening. Must've ducked out right after the six o'clock broadcast."

"Damn. I guess I'll try again tomorrow morning. Goodb—"

"Wait!"

"What?"

"Where are you?" Wendy whispered. "There's been a lot of…speculation around the office since you went AWOL."

"Oh, I'm sure the gossips had a field day," Elaine scoffed. "We're down in Norman."

"We?" Wendy asked, delicately—neutrally.

Elaine cursed silently at her own verbal slip and, pinching the bridge of her nose, admitted, "Yes. I brought Raymond with me. I needed a cameraman and I was not about to voluntarily spend time with Landry." Wendy's end of the line was quiet. Elaine swallowed once, feeling the urge to explain herself. "It's not anything…It's strictly professional."

"Of course." Wendy replied. Elaine thought she heard relief in Wendy's tone. "So, you went ahead with your story about the antiwar protests?"

"Yes, we interviewed some students and a faculty member at OU. There was a demonstration, but it descended into—" She hated to use the word, but there wasn't really any other way to describe the chaos that had unfolded on Owen Field. "—A riot."

"A *riot*?"

"Do you hear an echo on the line?" Elaine asked, growing annoyed at Wendy's propensity for drama.

"Sorry." Then, a second later, she said, "I was just worried."

Elaine wasn't quite sure how to respond to the gentleness in Wendy's voice, so she continued: "It started out peacefully—just some chanting and shouting, but the police…" She wasn't sure how much she should say.

"The police?"

"There it is again," Elaine pointed out.

"Oh, will you stop it? You can't start sentences like that and not finish them. Just tell me what happened!"

"The police arrested a few students. One of them had a Viet Cong flag."

"Oh," Wendy breathed. They both sat in a heavy silence for a moment. In that silence, Elaine heard a little pop on the line. She pressed the phone more firmly to her ear, listening closely. Seeming to sense the shift in her mood, Wendy asked, "Are you all right?"

"There's supposed to be a peaceful demonstration tomorrow morning," Elaine said. "It sounds like it'll be official, more organized. They're asking several faculty members to speak."

"So, when will you be back?"

"Tomorrow afternoon, probably." She switched the phone to her other hand. Her shoulder had begun to ache. "Evening at the latest."

"What should I tell Frank and Peggy?"

The line popped again.

"Don't tell them anything—not yet anyways."

"Okay," Wendy said. Silence fell over the line, except for that distant crackle. Elaine hoped she wasn't the only one hearing it. When Wendy spoke again, her tone was strangely airy and more formal. "Well. Stay safe. Goodnight."

Elaine hung up. She leaned forward onto her elbows and steepled her long fingers against her lips, considering her next move. Raymond emerged from the bathroom a few minutes later, his hair bejeweled with water droplets and the collar of his undershirt damp.

"Everything okay?"

"I just spoke with Wendy," she said, rubbing at her shoulder.

"And?"

Looking up at him, she said, "I think they tapped my work phone."

"Who?" he asked, unsurprised.

"I don't know yet."

Chapter Seventeen

Elaine slipped under the covers of her bed and flipped open her book, *Giovanni's Room*. In the other full-size bed, Raymond rolled onto his side, propped himself up on his elbow, and said, "Can I ask you a question?"

"I guess." She glanced over at him, suddenly feeling like she was at a slumber party—or trapped in an episode of the Dick Van Dyke Show.

"Why'd you agree to share this room with me?"

Elaine's stomach hollowed out. She had hoped that Raymond would leave the elephant in the room alone. She swallowed and shrugged. "It was the only one left."

"But we coulda gone somewhere else. You don't seem concerned by the…" He paused to give his word selection a bit more thought when Elaine shot him a cautionary glare. Clearing his throat, he continued, "The implications of us stayin' together."

She flipped the page, waited for a particularly loud clap of thunder to quiet, and said simply, "You're not my type."

Raymond chuckled lightly and nodded, rolling over onto his back. Elaine breathed a bit easier as it seemed he would leave it at that.

"What exactly about me isn't your type?"

Elaine gripped the edges of her book a little tighter and closed her eyes. She had envisioned how this conversation might eventually go with her loved ones, with her mother or her brother. She had never considered the idea that she would reveal such a personal part of her life with a coworker—especially a man. Then again, she wouldn't have expected to find herself sharing a motel room with a man either.

In her periphery, Raymond sat up, swung his legs over the edge of his bed, and surveyed her with a concerned expression.

"Sorry," he said softly. "Didn't mean to press. I wasn't tryna—"

"No, it's not—You're not…" She grappled for the right words and, when they evaded her, she sighed heavily. "You're a man."

"Hmm?" He seemed genuinely confused, his brows low over his eyes.

"That's why you're not my type."

Realization dawned on him and his eyebrows shot towards his hairline. Though she knew Raymond was a good man, a true friend, Elaine still braced herself for his response. The seconds stretched like hours and she thought she might suffocate. Studying the stained carpet, he replied, "You know, Huey P. Newton says we've got to liberate *all* oppressed peoples, including our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters."

A choked, desperate laugh escaped her. It was noise of relief and disbelief. She looked at Raymond and said, "I thought you didn't like the Panthers."

"Our beliefs aren't that different," he said, slipping back underneath the sheets of his bed. "I just don't always agree with their tactics."

Silence settled between them. Elaine kept her eyes on her book, but she waited for Raymond's response—his ultimate judgement.

"So." She could hear the smile in Raymond's voice. "You're *triple* trouble."

The next morning, the skies were clear. Though Elaine and Raymond stepped onto the dewy North Oval nearly forty-five minutes before the scheduled start of the rally, a crowd of hundreds had already congregated. There was a stage with a podium and a few chairs set up on one end. About twenty or so yards before they reached the stage, Elaine was surprised to find they were the fourth news crew to arrive. All the other reporters and their cameramen were white men. They didn't seem to register Elaine and Raymond's arrival. Additionally, they had taken up most of the area on the grass that would allow a decent shot of the speaker's podium. As Raymond set up the camera off to one side and began filming B-roll across the oval, Elaine smiled to herself. The other stations might get the better shot today, but they didn't know the whole story.

The quiet morning on the North Oval steadily melted away, drowned out by a disgruntled thrum. As ten o'clock rolled around, people pressed closer to Elaine and Raymond, closer to their camera. Raymond tried to politely ask people to stay clear of the lens but ended up hoisting the camera onto his shoulder.

Will Meyers called the rally to order—if such a thing was possible with a couple thousand people standing on the oval before him. He thanked everyone for coming and thanked the speakers, in advance, for their remarks. In the line-up, there were philosophy professors, sociology professors, a few student leaders, and the President of the University of Oklahoma, J. Herbert Hollomon.

When the latter rose to speak, the oval was stonier than ever before.

"Good morning. I want to personally thank each and every one of you for showing up here today and *peacefully* exercising your right to protest." As Hollomon moved through generic remarks about the importance of nonviolence and recognizing differences in perspectives, some booing broke out. Some bold students called him names. Bolder students called for him to pay the bail of those arrested during the previous day's demonstration. He deflected and said, "We support peaceful protestors."

This only served to aggravate more students. Hollomon continued, reading from the prepared statements before him. Elaine nudged Raymond and gestured for him to pan across the crowd. The thrumming of the Oval seemed to grow into a low growl, thundering overhead and underfoot.

When Dr. Henderson rose from his seat on the stage, Elaine could see the anger in his expression—even from such a distance away. He approached the podium and, without looking down at his papers, asked the crowd, "Why do you want to stop the dying abroad? Is it just so that there can be racial segregation, hate, and killing here?"

The students fell into an ashamed silence.

"I didn't think so. I'm asking all of you to follow the tradition of nonviolence that was established by Martin Luther King Jr. All war is terrible, all deaths are tragedies, and all of us are brothers and sisters." He still did not look down at his notes. Instead, he scanned the crowd, seeming to make eye contact with every student. Though she knew her face was likely just a brown dot in the distance, Elaine swore, for a moment, he was looking right at her. "Let each of us protest killing but show other people that we will not maim or wound them with our words, that we will not kill or hurt others for peace."

Dr. Henderson held up a peace sign to the crowd. In a low, thick voice, he said, “You give this sign. I hope you really mean it.”

The rally also heard more fiery speakers, like the local SDS chapter president, a young white man introduced as Mike Wright. However, the emotion on the North Oval did not threaten to boil over again. Instead, it seemed to be funneled, redirected. There seemed to be a renewed sense of purpose, though the tools were the same: marches, sit-ins, hunger strikes, plans for student government votes. As she and Raymond loaded the equipment into her car, Elaine found herself wondering if the same energy would survive once it was captured on film—once it was transmitted into television screens across the state, or even the country.

As they pulled into the parking garage at the K-TOT station, Elaine hoped desperately that Wilkinson would be moved by the same energy. She and Raymond entered the bullpen and glanced around at the empty desks. Wilkinson seemed to be waiting for them, despite the imminent six o’clock broadcast. Elaine figured he must have delegated most responsibility to Van Buren for the evening so that he could stand in the doorway of his office with his hands in his pockets.

“Well,” he said gruffly. “You’d better have something good.”

The three of them descended into the video editing room, where Raymond could play the film and Wilkinson would make his judgment. Elaine cringed in her chair as she watched herself introduce the segment. Then, the first moments of B-roll flickered across the screen. Though Elaine had stood on the field less than twenty four hours earlier, the images seemed strange to her. The camera, perched on Raymond’s shoulder, looked down on everything with an indifferent eye—including herself, who was striding confidently across the field.

Elaine tried to remain focused on the footage but kept sneaking sideways glances to appraise Wilkinson's expression. His square jaw was set, but his eyes watched the screen with undeniable interest. When he frowned suddenly, Elaine's attention snapped back to the screen. The picture slanted to the ground and refocused on the polished toes of Raymond's brown shoes. Elaine's microphone picked up Raymond's distant, crackling voice: "…*Officer, we've got our press badges*…"

"I told him to keep filming," Elaine muttered.

Raymond looked at her in disbelief and asked, "You wanted me to just sit there and film while you were getting detained?"

"If it would have gotten a better shot? Yes."

"All right, I think I've seen enough," Wilkinson said, and Raymond switched off the video. Before Elaine could plead her case, the Director of News issued his decision: "We're pushing this story back to ten o'clock." He looked to Raymond. "Cut the footage off when the camera drops. Prep whatever footage you've got from today's peaceful rally. Okay?"

Raymond nodded, his face a mask of stoicism.

"We'll run the two stories together. The problem and the solution."

Though the framing of the situation left Elaine feeling uneasy, the story's inclusion in the broadcast lifted a weight off her chest. She fought to keep the smile from her face as she replied, "Yes, sir. I'll get the preliminary script to the editors within the hour."

"One more thing," Wilkinson said. When he secured both Elaine and Raymond's full attentions, he pointed a thick finger at them. "If you two undermine me again, you're done here. Got it?"

"Understood, sir." Raymond replied.

Wilkinson looked hard at Elaine and she could only nod.

#

After the six o'clock broadcast and a stiff post-production meeting led by Peggy, Wendy returned to the bullpen to find Elaine emerging from the editors' office. Chest aching with relief, she rushed across the bullpen and cried out, "You're back!"

Elaine seemed startled and murmured a greeting, her voice tight with discomfort. Wendy pulled up short and look Elaine up and down. While Elaine grasped a freshly typed script in her right hand, her left arm was being held still, bent at a slight angle and kept close to her body. In a hushed tone, Wendy asked, "Are you all right?"

Elaine shifted under the intensive observation and, avoiding eye contact, explained, "We had a little run in with a state trooper. My shoulder's just a little sore."

"You have to tell me everything. Can we get drinks?"

"I'm exhausted, Wendy. I just finished this script and—"

"Please," she begged. "Just one round. On me."

Elaine did look tired. Her eyes were bloodshot and her usually severe posture had melted into an exhausted slouch. Despite her evident fatigue, she seemed to catch onto the weight of Wendy's tone and nodded.

"Are there any bars near your place?" she asked. "That way, you'll get home quicker."

"Yes, but I don't think you'll—"

"Doesn't matter if it's not my scene," she insisted. "As long as they can make a Manhattan, it's my kind of place."

"More importantly," Elaine said. "They've got a television."

"So?"

"So, we can watch the ten o' clock broadcast."

The bar was apparently quite the little hole in the wall. It was only a block away from Elaine's apartment, with an entrance hidden in an alleyway Wendy never would have braved on her own. The space was warm and a bit hazy with smoke. The smell awoke Wendy's nicotine cravings again, which had subsided after several weeks of abstaining from any cigarettes. As Elaine guided them to a pair of stools in front of the long bar, Wendy noticed that the clientele was exclusively female. Women of all shapes, sizes, and colors. She thought she saw a man at the pool table in the far corner but realized a moment later that she was actually a woman—though her hair was cropped short and her broad shoulders filled out a worn leather jacket. Elaine ordered their usual drinks from the bartender, who greeted her by name. Bathing everything in a soft pink light from its position on the wall behind the bar, a neon sign blazed in cursive: *Milwaukee Tavern.*

Wendy decided it was an odd name for a bar in Tulsa, Oklahoma. She wondered briefly if the sign was stolen. However, their drinks arrived quickly, and Elaine took long swig.

"Back at the station, you said you had written up a script," Wendy prompted. "Did Frank greenlight your footage?"

Elaine nodded, but her mouth remained set at a dissatisfied angle.

"Yes, but they're framing today's demonstration as a solution to yesterday's riot problem." In a mocking tone, she recalled a line from the script: "*The dialogue facilitated by the administration has cooled the tempers of the raging student groups*."

Wendy could smell the light scent of juniper on Elaine's breath.

"Haven't things calmed down though?"

"It's a half truth. The rally was helpful. It seemed productive—almost cathartic, but not because of anything the administration did. Hollomon almost got booed off the stage." Elaine shook her heard and took a sip of her drink.

"At least it's in the line-up broadcast," Wendy said. "Maybe there won't be time for anyone to tamper with it?"

Elaine shrugged and took another drink—a longer gulp. She glanced at her watch and nearly choked. Waving for the bartender's attention, she sputtered, "Joan! Hey, Joan, can you change the channel to K-TOT?"

The bartender—Joan—sighed but quickly dragged one of the barstools around and reached up for the knob on the black and white box. A couple seconds later, they were looking at Rich Johnson, the ten o'clock anchor. The volume was too low. Rich's voice was nearly lost in the din of the bar.

"That's as loud as it goes," Joan said apologetically.

"That's okay," Elaine said, though Wendy suspected it really wasn't.

They peered up at the television; the sharp angle pained the back of Wendy's neck. However, the footage from OU had started and Wendy found herself enthralled.

Elaine appeared, standing outside the stadium. Wendy tried to lip read, but the television was too far away to glean much detail. The picture cut to the stadium's interior. The student groups brandished their signs and chanted, while the cadets marching and saluting. In the background, on the periphery of the camera's omniscient eye, the police waited. Wendy shuddered and took a drink as she wondered how close the riot was to becoming another Kent

State. When she looked back up, Elaine was interviewing two Black men. Though she didn't recognize the older man, Wendy smiled as Will Meyer's infectious grin materialized on the screen. In the closer shot with a different student, Wendy was able to read Elaine's lips: "How does this event serve your cause?"

For a moment, Wendy heard the words in her head. She almost turned to see if Elaine had spoken them aloud, beside her in the bar. However, before she could look, before the student on the screen could answer the question, static shredded the picture.

Rich returned to the screen, looking more serious than usual. He began speaking quickly in an apologetic tone. Between lip reading and the occasional audible blurb, Wendy discerned there had been some sort of technical difficulties. Rich said something more about broadcast technicians, but then moved on to the next story. Wendy watched the screen in shock, until she felt movement beside her.

"Technical difficulties," Elaine repeated, viciously articulating each syllable.

"I'm sorry," Wendy said quietly. "Sometimes film gets damaged like that. Maybe during the riot—"

"But it wasn't damaged!" she cried out, bringing her fist down hard on the bar top. The ice in their glasses clinked with the shock. "We double checked—triple checked!"

Around the bar, a few women were glancing over at them, trying to locate the source of and reason for the outburst. Wendy touched Elaine's forearm.

"Elaine, people—"

"I need you to read my report on the air tomorrow," Elaine said, her voice trembling in a way that startled Wendy. "And I don't mean the sanitized version—I mean the truth."

While she conceded that incredibly suspicious things were happening to Elaine's work, that it was likely the intentional efforts of someone at the station, Wendy wasn't certain that sabotaging the broadcast outright was the answer. It certainly wouldn't be a sustainable effort. Such explicit undermining would be grounds for dismissal. Between the idea of losing her job and Elaine's intense stare, Wendy found it difficult to think properly.

"I- I don't know," she stammered, grasping for any alternative theory that would help her escape from the prospect of risking her career. "It could have been an accident…a bad splice between the reels."

Elaine shook her head in frustration and said, "Raymond edited the film himself."

"He could've made a mistake." Wendy tossed back the remainder of her drink.

"Why can't you face the fact that something's going on here? Someone is intentionally disrupting my reporting. They're preventing people getting the real news."

"So, what?" Wendy replied, her voice rising in pitch and volume. "You want me to risk my career, so you can feel a little bit better about yours?"

"This isn't about either of our careers," Elaine said as if their jobs were trivial pursuits. "It's about the truth. That's what *real* journalists care about."

"I am a real journalist!" Wendy nearly shouted.

"Then prove it!" Elaine snapped and slammed a few dollar bills on the counter. Snagging her coat off the back of the chair, she stormed out and left Wendy alone in the crowded bar.

Chapter Eighteen

"Go to lunch with me?" Wendy asked, having finally caught Elaine's eye over the partition. All morning, Wendy had watched Elaine take great strides to avoid interacting with her. She was absent when Wendy first arrived and, in the morning meeting, kept her eyes forward on Frank or down on her notepad. However, when Wendy sniffled, a consequence of the day's elevated levels of ragweed, the glance Elaine had tried to steal was not as surreptitious as it was concerned. Wendy had recognized and seized upon the opportunity without hesitation, blurting out the question.

Mouth set at an irritated angle, Elaine refocused on the document in her typewriter and replied, "I brought a sandwich."

"Please? I need to talk to you about…" Wendy scanned the room. Though she found most everyone preoccupied with work or other conversations, she wondered how to broach the topic of undermining the station's leadership without arousing suspicion. Turning back to Elaine, she regretted that they hadn't established some kind of codeword. "About a *gentleman*."

Fingers frozen over the keys of her typewriter, Elaine looked up with a knowing expression and wryly repeated, "A gentleman?" She leaned forward onto her elbows, laced her

long fingers together, and rested her chin atop them. “Some poor sap’s been giving you the run around, hmm?”

“The one you introduced me to yesterday,” Wendy elaborated and glanced over the to Frank’s office. Through the blinds, she could see him leaning back in his chair and talking on the telephone. She looked back at Elaine, who was watching her with increasing interest. “I’ve thinking about that gentleman a lot—I was up half the night, in fact. I had to use extra concealer this morning.”

“Can’t tell.”

“That’s because I invest in good quality concealer—Maybelline.” She shook her head before she began to ramble. “Anyways, I’m afraid I judged that gentleman a bit too quickly.”

“And?”

Wendy had tossed and turned until nearly three a.m. as she replayed her argument with Elaine over in her head. The evidence, she realized, was overwhelming. Peggy’s position, her privilege to move about the station without any question, allowed her—and her alone—the opportunities to tamper with scripts and film.

“Well, I’d like to give him a second chance.”

Elaine inhaled and exhaled loudly before conceding: “Fine. Let’s go.”

“Lafayette’s?”

“Wherever.”

With that settled, they gathered their things and headed out. As they waited in the elevator, Wendy felt compelled to clarify something else.

“For the record,” she added, tossing her hair over one shoulder. “Men don’t give me the run around. I make *them* do the running.”

"Oh, I'm sure they run," Elaine replied. The elevator dinged and the doors slid open. She slipped her sunglasses on and arched an eyebrow. "But the question is…in which direction?"

"Details, details."

Wendy and Elaine found a suitable table in the far corner of the café, away from the front door and the cashier who was obviously eavesdropping on customers from her perch behind the register. As usual, Elaine elected to forego polite small talk. She arched eyebrow at Wendy and said, "So?"

"I thought about it and I want to read your story. The real one." Though she had made the decision the night before, speaking the words to Elaine brought Wendy a rush of relief.

"Really?"

"Really."

The cashier, who apparently doubled as a food runner, approached the table and set down their food: a Caesar salad for Elaine and a chicken salad croissant and cup of soup for Wendy. After the cashier was once again out of earshot, Elaine asked, "What changed?"

"I thought about what you said last night—"

"I'm sorry about that, by the way. I got a little caught up in things."

"No, you were right. I realized how selfish I was being. This is an opportunity to spread the truth…do some real good."

When Wendy looked up again, there was something new in the way Elaine was looking at her—the light honeyed gaze she had become familiar with was darker, more somber.

"Elaine?"

Wendy looked up to see her neighbor, Kathleen, approaching their table and offering Elaine a winsome smile that rivaled her own. Her brown hair was pulled back into a sleek chignon at the nape of her neck, while her nurse's cap kept things neat in the front. Much to Wendy's surprise, Elaine smiled back—though her jaw was tight, and she showed a little too much teeth.

Kathleen rested her free hand on her hip and, in a playful, but still accusatory tone, asked, "Did I see you at the Tavern the other night?" Belated realization dawned on her face as Kathleen registered her neighbor's presence. "Oh. Hi, Wendy. How's it going?"

Elaine looked a bit like a cornered cat, her eyes flickering between Kathleen and Wendy.

"Good, good. Just having lunch," Wendy smiled up at her neighbor, though her presence felt very much like an intrusion. It looked like Elaine tried to smile as well, but she ended up composing her features into something more closely resembling a grimace.

"Well, I just wanted to say hello. So, I'll leave you two to your lunch," Kathleen said, dropping a light hand on Elaine's shoulder. Then, as she turned to leave, she looked at Elaine and whispered, "We should get together again soon." Elaine didn't move until the door closed behind Kathleen.

"So," Wendy said delicately as she stirred her cup of soup.

"We went out for drinks," Elaine said and quickly stuffed a forkful of salad into her mouth.

"At the Tavern?"

"At the Tavern."

They ate in silence for several moments. With each bite of her sandwich, Wendy found it difficult to swallow. She contemplated how she might breech the topic more explicitly but, when

she noticed a light sheen of sweat had broken out across Elaine's forehead, she decided it best to change the subject.

"So, how are we getting your story on the air?"

"I spoke to Wilkinson this morning. He said they'll just re-air the same old script, sans footage. Obviously," Elaine replied, frowning. "But you had a good point about the hardcopy script. It would draw too much attention. So, I noticed that the intern who enters script into the teleprompter doesn't actually read what she's typing."

"Of course, you would notice that," Wendy teased, despite being thoroughly impressed by the observation. "But doesn't a producer check it as well?"

"Yes, but Raymond says they usually only read the beginning of each story, just enough to make sure everything is in the right order. As long as we keep the first few lines the same, we can get the real story in there."

It was a bolder plan, than before. But after seeing—or not seeing—Elaine's footage from the rally, Wendy decided that bolder actions were merited.

Elaine kept the details of how exactly things would work out a secret from Wendy. It was for the sake of deniability, she had explained. All Wendy knew with certainty was that Elaine would somehow get her words on the teleprompter when no one was looking, and Raymond would work his magic in the editing room. Wendy's only responsibility was to read like everything was normal.

After they returned from lunch, the afternoon seemed to rush by. Before Wendy knew it, she was watching Elaine leave for the day and she was heading downstairs for the broadcast. Wendy bounced her leg under the desk, waiting for the cosmetology intern to powder her face.

The crew moved about with their usual urgency, the junior producer calling the countdown while Frank and Peggy were shuffling into the production suite. The broadcast began normally enough, though a new tension was winding deep within Wendy's chest.

Elaine's story was slated towards the end of the broadcast, right after Betty parroted the daily weather forecast. The junior producer counted down in Wendy's ear and she took a deep breath as the text rose steadily from the bottom of the screen.

"Next, we're bringing you news from Norman, Oklahoma. This afternoon, in a student body vote with record thin margins, a University wide strike was struck down. The proposed strike was a reaction to the events that unfolded on campus Tuesday morning. A large group of students gathered in the football stadium at the University of Oklahoma in response to the murder of four Kent State students by the Ohio National Guard on Monday."

In the production suite, Frank and Peggy's heads snapped up simultaneously.

"The morning began peacefully enough but, according to our Eyewitness Correspondent, after one student waved a flag with the National Liberation Front emblem, police treated the gathering as a riot and dispersed the crowd. Though most students only suffered minor injuries from the police's tactics to clear the field, three students were arrested."

All movement on the studio floor ceased and Wendy could barely hear her own voice over the thumping of her pulse in her ears.

"However, the following day saw a rally organized by the student body president, Mr. William Meyers. This event remained peaceful throughout the morning, despite several contentious speakers addressing the crowd. Though it did not completely pacify the high tempers on campus, according to many students, they felt the rally redirected them into more productive activities for their movement. We will keep you updated as we learn more."

With every eye in the studio on her, Wendy read the final story. She no longer comprehended what she was saying. Her eyes read the words and mouth spoke them. Finally, she signed off, the lights dimmed, and the klaxon blared.

"Who fucked up the teleprompter?" Frank bellowed as he stomped out of the production suite. He slammed the script on the ground. "That was *not* the story we approved!" He wheeled around to Wendy. "What happened?"

She threw her hands up in mock frustration and cried out, "I just read what was put in front of me!" Crossing her arms, she shifted all her weight into one hip. "Would you like me to start questioning edits while I'm on-air?"

Frank waved the suggestion aside and hollered for the post-production meeting, which consisted mostly of more yelling. Like a disappointed father, Frank shouted about accountability and work ethic, eventually droning on about the importance of journalistic integrity and truth. Peggy sat quietly, smooth-faced through it all. Wendy thought she saw the corner of her thin lips twitch upward. After Frank dismissed them, Wendy made a beeline for the stairs. She intended to march up to the roof and snag a cigarette from the pack she had stashed weeks earlier. However, with the thrill of the broadcast still thrumming in her joints, she stopped just inside the roof's access door. She realized that she needed to speak with Elaine.

Gripping tight to the handrail, Wendy hurried back down to the sixth floor. The bullpen was empty—trapped in the lull between the six o'clock and ten o'clock broadcast. Wendy gathered her things quickly, her mind racing to predict what Elaine would say.

"What the *hell* was that?"

Wendy whipped around to find Peggy standing just a few feet away, eyes narrowed.

"I'm sorry." The words felt emptier. She offered the executive producer a shrug. "I just read what's put in front of me."

"We could train a monkey to do that."

Something deep in Wendy's chest began to burn. She folded her jacket over her arm and snapped, "Well, why don't you? You could pay it even less." As she moved to pass Peggy, the older woman shot out a surprisingly strong hand and took Wendy by the arm. The chill from Peggy's fingers seeped through Wendy's blouse and made her shiver.

"What happened to the script?" Peggy demanded and glared through Wendy.

"How the hell am I supposed to know?" She replied and jerked away from the frigid touch. "Aren't your producers supposed to catch mistakes like this?"

The accusation seemed to stun Peggy, just for a moment. Wendy, seeing her opportunity, bolted for the elevator and glanced back only once the doors started to slide closed. Peggy stood motionless, glowering at Elaine's desk.

Wendy felt drunk, despite still being a mile away from the bar. As she walked, she laughed into her hand at the absurdity of it—she'd never imagined pulling a stunt like that. She tugged open the door to the Milwaukee Tavern and scanned the dimly lit room. Through the smoke, she realized the place was packed. Above the bar, there was a purple neon sign that declared it was ladies' night. All around her, women chatted together, drank together, danced together.

"Wendy!" Elaine was already twisted around on a barstool and waving from the far end of the bar. With a strange thrill in the pit of her stomach, Wendy hurried over and stifled a cry of surprise as Elaine swept her up in her arms and declared joyfully, "You did it!"

Elaine set Wendy back down on her feet but, in the cramped space, kept her close, kept hands at Wendy's waist. Giggling at the unexpected enthusiasm, Wendy said, "*You* did it! You wrote it and got it on the prompter. I only read the damn thing."

"True—but no one could've read it better!" Elaine's cheeks looked flushed. Wendy wondered if she'd put on makeup, but then noticed the trio of tumblers behind her—two emptied, one halfway there. If she was intoxicated, she hid it rather well. There wasn't any clumsiness in her movements, she just seemed to be in a remarkably good mood. Clinging tightly to Elaine, Wendy felt giddy, almost intoxicated herself.

"Sit, sit!" Elaine instructed, gesturing to the barstool next to her, and turned to the bartender. "Bulleit Manhattan with extra bitters, please."

Wendy stashed her purse by her feet and took a seat, their knees pressed together beneath the bar top. Her gut thrilled at all the new intimacies. Leaning closer, Elaine asked excitedly, "So, what did Wilkinson say? Was he furious?"

"Oh, he blew a gasket, but he didn't suspect me—thank you," she said, as the bartender slid the Manhattan in front of her. She took a sip, relishing the contrast between the warm, spicy flavor and the near freezing temperature of the drink. She leaned closer to Elaine. "He assumed someone had accidently submitted the old draft. He went after that intern. Oh, what's her name…" Wendy pressed her fingertips to her temple and closed her eyes. She couldn't think properly, not with the music or the cloud of smoke or with Elaine looking at her so intently.

"To interns," Elaine toasted solemnly and raised her drink with a wry smile. Wendy clinked their glasses and they drank.

END